

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 OMB-01 /086 W

-----040605Z 068291 /15

R 021200Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1425

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL DJIBOUTI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANA 2106

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ET

SUBJECT: EDU MILITARY ORGANIZATIONBEGIN SUMMARY: EDU

LEADER TASSEW DESTA DESCRIBES GROWING

MILITARY ORGANIZATION IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA -- AND GROWING

DIRG RESISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. EDU LEADER TASSEW DESTA, WHO HAS FREQUENTLY CONTACTED EMBASSY IN PAST, TOOK INITIATIVE TO SPEAK TO DCM ON 30 MAY ABOUT HIS RECENT TRIP INTO PARTS OF NORTHERN ETHIOPIA NOW UNDER EDU CONTROL. DESTA IS FORMER COMMANDER OF EHTIOPIAN NAVY AND FRIEND OF ASSASSINATED DIRG CHAIRMAN TEFERI BENTE. A HIGHLY CONSCIENTIOUS MAN WITH A US DEGREE, HE RESIGNED HIS AMBASSADORSHIP IN SANA TO PROTEST COMMUNISM IN HIS HOMELAND AND WAS GIVEN ASYLUM BY YARG. HE HAS SINCE ATTENDED EDU CONFERENCE IN LONDON WHERE HE WAS NAMED OFFICER IN CHARGE OF EDU "EASTERN REGION", AN AREA WHICH HE CANNOT ENTER OR INFLUENCE GREATLY. HE HAS, THEREFORE, IN THE PAST 10 DAYS TRAVELED TO KHARTOUM AND THEN SOUTH

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TO BEGEMDIR PROVINCE INETHIOPIA ALONG SUDANESE BORDER.

DESTA HAD AS A RESULT OF THIS TRIP SOME INTERESTING

COMMENTS ON BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL TASKS OF EDU.

GIVEN EMBASSY'S FORMER CONTACTS WITH DESTA, WE ACCEPT

HIS REMARKS AT FACE VALUE.

2. EDU STARTED WITH NO MILITARY ORGANIZATION WHICH COULD

TAKE THE FIELD ALTHOUGH IT HAD ACCUMULATED SUPPORT FROM VARIETY OF MILITARY OFFICERS WHO HAD DEFECTED LIKE DESTA. ITS INITIAL SUCCESS WAS IN HUMARA ON SUDANESE BORDER IN NORTHERN CORNER OF BEGEMDIR PROVINCE. THIS IS SIZEABLE CITY WHICH ROSE AGAINST DIRG FORCES AFTER ARRESTS AND EXECUTIONS OF LOCAL LEADERS HAD ENRAGED THE POPULATION. ACCORDING TO DESTA, LOCAL DIRG GARRISON SURRENDERED BUT SOME WERE BADLY TREATED, GIVEN STRONG AVERSION OF HUMARA PEOPLE TO ANYONE IN UNIFORM. EDU PLAYED RELATIVELY SMALL ROLE IN THIS FIRST DIRG REVERSAL BUT WITH WEAPONS AND SOME OF FORMER DIRG TROOPS THE EDU LED THE BATTLE IN METEMA, ANOTHER BEGEMDIR BORDER CITY SOUTH OF HUMARA. GARRISON IN METEMA, WITH NEWS OF MISTREATMENT OF DIRG FORCES IN UMARA, RESISTED STOUTLY BUT WERE FINALLY OVERCOME. LOCAL POPULATION PLUS EDU LEVIES THEN APPARENTLY SLAUGHTERED MORE THAN 1,000 OF CAPTURED DIRG FORCES.

3. DESTA SAYS THAT BATTLE OF METEMA SHOWS THAT EDU HAS CAPABILITY FIELD FORCE OF ITS OWN WHICH CAN USE MODERN WEAPONS AND COORDINATE MILITARY ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL PEASANTRY. HE ADDS, HOWEVER, THAT ATROCITY IN METEMA WILL ENSURE RESISTANCE OF SO-CALLED FLAME BRIGADE WHICH NOW DEFENDING GONDAR IN SOUTH CENTRAL BEGEMDIR.

4. ACCORDING TO DESTA, GONDAR IS KEY EDU OBJECTIVE. AREAS OF TIGRE AND BEGEMDIR WHICH NOW "LIBERATED" FROM DIRG CONTAIN 1-1/2 MILLION PEOPLE. GONDAR IS ANCIENT CAPITAL OF ETHIOPIA WHICH WILL GIVE EDU SEAT FOR AD-
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VANCE INTO GOJJAM AND WOLLEGA TO SOUTH. IT WILL ALSO MEAN THAT DIRG POSITION IN ASMARA WILL BE IMPERILED.

5. LARGE FORCE -- DESTA SAYS 20,000 -- LEFT HUMARA TWO WEEKS AGO TO MOVE DOWN ROAD TO GONDAR. FORCE CONSISTED ENTIRELY OF PEASANT LEVIES ARMED WITH RIFLES AND ORGANIZED IN VILLAGE CONTINGENTS. EDU DOES NOT PROVIDE PAY OR ANY SUPPLIES EXCEPT AMMUNITION. THEY WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE SOME MORTAR SUPPORT AND MEDICAL SUPPORT BUT LEADERSHIP OF FORCES IS UNDER 7-YEAR-OLD RURAL LEADER NAMED ADANA AND MILITARY TRAINING -- IF NOT ENTHUSIASM -- OF GONDAR FORCE IS ALMOST NIL. DESTA SAYS MUCH SMALLER EDU FORCE OF 1,000 MEN -- WITH MODERN CAPTURED ARMS AND REAL MILITARY TRAINING -- LEFT METEMA TO APPROACH GONDAR SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM WEST. HOWEVER, IN LAST WEEK FLAME BRIGADE CAUGHT PEASANT FORCE BY SURPRISE AND DROVE IT FROM POSITION 25 KILOMETERS FROM GONDAR TO POSITION ABOUT 75 KILOMETERS AWAY. DESTA SAYS THAT GONDAR FORCE WAS ABLE TO WITH-

DRAW IN ORDER AND INFLICT CASUALTIES ON FLAME BRIGADE BUT NOW MUST REORGANIZE AND GO OVER AGAIN TO THE OFFENSIVE. DESTA IS CONFIDENT THIS WILL OCCUR SOON AND SAYS THAT HE WILL RETURN TO BEGEMDIR TO SERVE AS CHIEF OF STAFF TO GENERAL NAGA WHO WILL BE OVERALL COMMANDER IN THAT SECTOR. DESTA WILL MAINTAIN RESIDENCE IN SNA, HOWEVER. NAGA IS FROM BEGEMDIR, "WHICH HELPS ALOT", SAYS DESTA. DESTA SAYS RAS MENGESHA, WHO IS TIGRE LEADER AND EDU STALWART, IS EXPECTED RETURN FROM AMMO PURCHASE TRIP FROM ITALY TO TAKE THE FIELD. UP TO NOW DESTA SAYS EDU FORCES IN TIGRE HAVE BEEN WHOLLY CONCERNED WITH FIGHTING TPLF RATHER THAN DIRG. HOWEVER, SAYS DESTA, EDU FORCES HAVE DEFEATED TPLF AND ARE READY TO TAKE FIELD AGAINST DIRG.

6. DESTA SAYS HE IS PUZZLED BY ACTIVITY OF ETHIOPIAN AIR FORCE. WHILE THEY APPEAR OVER LINES OF COMMUNICATION

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TIONS AND ENCAMPMENTS THEIR BOMBS FALL WIDE OF MARK AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT PLUS REFITTING GOES ON DURING DAYLIGHT WITHOUT ANY INTERRUPTION. DESTA SAYS GROUND FORCES OF DIRG ARE BY CONTRAST MUCH MORE FORMIDABLE FIGHTING FORCE.

7. DESTA SAYS EDU HAS GIVEN TOP PRIORITY TO ESTABLISHING RADIO STATIONS IN HUMARA AND METEMA PLUS THIRD AND LARGER STATION INSIDE SUDAN. RADIO STATIONS WILL GIVE EDU A CRUCIAL AND PERSUASIVE VOICE TO COUNTER PROPAGANDA OF DIRG. EDU GENERAL IASEYU IS EXPECTED SHORTLY IN KHARTOUM FROM LONDON TO COORDINATE OVERALL FIGHTING WITH SUDANESE AND OTHER FRIENDLY POWERS AS WELL AS OVERSEE SUPPORT OF FORCES IN THE FIELD. EDU IS DAILY

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SANA 2106

GROWING AS A COMPETENT MILITARY AND POLITICAL
FORCE, ACCORDING TO DESTA, BECAUSE OF AMPLE FOREIGN
SUPPORT AND INCREASING DEFECTION FROM ETHIOPIAN RANKS.
SUDANESE LIGHT ARMS HAVE BEGUN
TO FLOW TO LOCAL LEADERS
IN WOLLEGA AND GOJJAM.

COMMENT: DESTA'S FRANK DESCRIPTIONS OF LOGISTIC AND
LEADERSHIP WEAKNESSES, PLUS PROBLEMS OF TRAINING AND
ATROCITIES, SUGGEST TO US THAT FLAME BRIGADE REMAINS IN
GOOD POSITION TO HOLD GONDAR AT LEAST UP TO COMING RAINY
SEASON. HOWEVER, IF EDU TRIBESMEN CAN BE KEPT IN FIELD
AT THAT TIME, WHEN DIRG ADVANTAGES IN AIR SUPPORT AND
MECHANICAL TRANSPORT HAVE BEEN REDUCED BY RAIN, THEN
THERE IS SOME CHANCE GONDAR WILL FALL. HOWEVER,
LOCAL PEASANT FORCES MAY NOT BE WILLING TO
CONTINUE SOUTH AND EAST.

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Message Attributes

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